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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3731
INFO RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK 5786
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1957
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 5245
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 5266
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 8236
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 2845
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 5925
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 9826
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 8332
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3250
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 3762
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RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 2940
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC
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RHMFISS/HQ USSOCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RHMFISS/HQ USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 003266

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SUBJECT: SRI LANKAN ENVOY URGES INDIAN ENGAGEMENT, BUT
DOMESTIC POLITICS CONSTRAIN DELHI

REF: COLOMBO 721

Classified By: DCM Bob Blake Jr., Reason 1.5 (B,D)

11. (C) Summary: Sri Lanka's visiting Foreign Minister has requested India's help to resume peace talks with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), while concurrently seeking India's assistance to choke LTTE's financial and logistical resources. Despite Sri Lanka's request, domestic politics are likely to complicate any new GOI commitments. DMK, a regional political party needed by the current governing coalition to retain its majority, appears to have won Assembly elections in the populous southern state of Tamil Nadu. DMK's leadership and political base is sympathetic to the cause of Tamils on the island, and that large state government will oppose any overt GOI military assistance to Sri Lanka's Sinhalese-led government. In the meantime, the GOI is deepening India's economic partnership with Sri Lanka. End summary.

High-level Visitors Engage India on Security Issues

12. (C) May 8-9 a Sri Lankan delegation led by Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera concluded three days of talks in New Delhi with GOI officials including Prime Minister Singh, National Security Advisor Narayanan, Foreign Secretary Saran, and Defense Minister Mukherjee. This unusually high-level reception reflects the importance New Delhi ascribes to its Sri Lanka relationship. Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) officials told Poloff that Samaraweera sought help to restart peace talks with the LTTE, while urging India to apply

pressure on the separatist group to come to the bargaining table by choking off its financial and materiel resources. Open sources also report that the Sri Lankan delegation requested increased Indian naval patrols as well as training and other defense assistance to the Sri Lankan military.

No New Indian Commitments to Sri Lanka

13. (C) MEA's Sri Lanka Desk Officer told Poloff that there were "no new commitments made" as a result of the visit. Indo-Asian News Service journalist and LTTE leader Prabhakaran biographer M.R. Narayan Swamy said to Poloff that Foreign Minister Samaraweera's visit was of "no consequence" and that "nothing new would come out of it." Narayan Swamy also commented that the same Indian messages raised in past meetings were also conveyed in this visit, namely that the Sri Lankan government must put its own house in order and agree on a devolution package that is acceptable to both sides.

Other Bilateral Issues Also Raised

14. (U) While little progress was made discussing security issues, MEA's Sri Lanka Desk Officer told Poloff that the bilateral talks did advance the Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement between India and Sri Lanka, which has advanced bilateral economic and trade cooperation in a number of areas. Specifically, this week's talks furthered discussions on India's concessional grants for major

NEW DELHI 00003266 002 OF 002

infrastructure projects, such as Sri Lanka's principal rail line, as well as assistance to a number of smaller projects in the health and education sectors. The two sides also held meetings regarding cooperation in the petroleum sector, where the Indian Oil Corporation operates a joint retail venture with Sri Lanka's Ceylon Petroleum Corporation. Finally, Sri Lanka sought India's support for the candidature of Jayanta Dhanapala for UN Secretary General.

Comment: Domestic Politics Play a Significant Role in India's Foreign Policy Making

15. (C) India faces an ongoing delicate balance between satisfying internal Tamil political constituencies and pursuing its strategic interests. While the governing United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government seeks stability and peace in Sri Lanka and opposes the LTTE, it also must be careful not to upset its important coalition partner Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), which is dominated by Tamils who would view negatively any apparent support of the Sinhalese government at the expense of Tamils in Sri Lanka. Polling data suggests that DMK will win state assembly elections held this week in the populous southern state of Tamil Nadu, heralding caution that New Delhi's central government must not upset its Tamil coalition members who form an important part of the ruling UPA's fragile coalition and give it 20 votes in Parliament. The UPA government's careful balancing act with its left supporters demands that domestic political considerations play a significant role in India's foreign policy making, especially when those foreign policy issues have a substantial domestic dimension.

Comment: Once Burned in Sri Lanka, Twice Shy

16. (C) Indian reluctance to play a leading role in the resolution of the Sri Lankan conflict also stems from its past efforts in the 1980s to resolve the long-standing conflict, which resulted in failure for Indian peacekeeping forces deployed to Sri Lanka and the LTTE assassination of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. Therefore GOI Ministry of External Affairs and intelligence officials who may be

inclined to play a more active role in managing the Sri Lankan conflict are tempered by past experience which demonstrated the intractable difficulty and danger of becoming engaged in Sri Lanka's internal strife. End comment.

17. (U) Visit New Delhi's Classified Website:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/sa/newdelhi/>
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